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SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 648th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 9 April 1991, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. RANA (Nepal)

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Hearings with four South African academic experts on current developments in the field of education

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

HEARINGS WITH FOUR SOUTH AFRICAN ACADEMIC EXPERTS ON CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

1. The CHAIRMAN said that education played a fundamental role in a nation's development and progress. In South Africa that role was particularly important because educational policies, structures and services reflected the legacy of apartheid. In South Africa, unlike most other countries, not everyone had access to education. The educational system was based on racial policies and promoted political, economic, social and cultural division within the people of a single nation and, what was still worse, it perpetuated an attitude of submission to those who, because of their race, enjoyed a better and more progressive education.

2. Unless a fundamental basis was established guaranteeing a rational and progressive academic education for all the people of South Africa, it would be impossible to fully dismantle the system of apartheid or to establish a non-racial South Africa. The generation of young people who would constitute the future leadership must receive a comprehensive education, not only with regard to science and culture, but especially with regard to history, philosophy and ethical values. Currently there were two kinds of education in South Africa, determined according to race. That should not be, since any doctrine of separatism, racial superiority and intolerance was totally lacking in morality.

3. Black educators in South Africa were in a unique situation. With limited resources, in addition to educating the young and the poor, they had to combat deeply rooted theories regarding black inferiority and the need to continue segregation, and also laws which limited access to a wide range of teaching materials and created a tremendous financial imbalance between per capita spending on education for the black population and on that for the white population. That imbalance was an immeasurable obstacle to the social, cultural, scientific and technological advancement of the black population. Accordingly, if one wanted to establish a non-racial and democratic regime in South Africa, education in that country could not be relegated to second place.

4. The United Nations had recognized the need to provide alternative education to the black population of South Africa which did not have that right in its own country, and had, for that reason, created the United Nations Educational and Training Programme for Southern Africa. Nonetheless, that programme could not replace the services currently being provided by educators in South Africa; those services would continue to decline without support and financial assistance from the international community. Exchanges of views with people who had first-hand knowledge of the problems and needs of the South African educational system contributed to a better understanding of the aims and aspirations of educators and pupils and to create greater willingness to contribute to the maintenance of those objectives. To that end the Special

(The Chairman)

Committee was sponsoring, together with UNESCO, a conference on the needs of the black population of South Africa in respect of education, which was to be held in Paris in June of that year.

5. There could not be full freedom unless freedom of education was guaranteed and encouraged. Accordingly, it was necessary to help facilitate by every means possible the establishment and improvement of a progressive educational system in South Africa, based on equality of all the peoples and aimed at ensuring that everyone was able to exercise the right to acquire knowledge.

6. Mr. FIFE (Advisory Committee of the United Nations Educational and Training Programme for Southern Africa) said that, in view of recent developments in South Africa, it would be very useful to hear the comments of experts concerning the educational situation of the black population in that country. Education was one of the basic tools for shaping and cementing the bases of a South Africa that would be united and free of racial discrimination. He hoped that the experts would help consider the possibility that persons holding fellowships under the Programme might utilize the educational institutions of the country in the future.

7. Mr. SAMUEL (Education Director, African National Congress of South Africa) said that the statistics on education were well known and they highlighted the most visible consequences of the apartheid system. At the same time, it was necessary to underscore the longer term effects of that education, since it would be necessary, when reconstructing the educational system and society in general, to correct many of the structural and historical imbalances created by apartheid. Three principal factors should be taken into consideration in that regard. One was the manner in which the primary- and secondary-school student population had been relocated in rural areas and homelands, for two thirds of that population were in areas which did not have adequate educational services. Another was the tremendous imbalance in the type of training and quality of education provided. Although South Africa was an industrialized country, only a small minority of black students had graduated in technical sciences. The third factor was the way in which generations of young people had been alienated from the learning process in the past 10 to 20 years.

8. At the beginning of the year when the examination results of black students had been published, it had been revealed that national education was in an extremely grave situation. Following a meeting between President de Klerk and a group of educators organized by the Vice-President of the African National Congress of South Africa, a joint working group had been established with the mission of submitting proposals so as to start to deal with the educational crisis. Basically, the group was dealing with three main issues: the attempt to establish a single educational system, the task of dealing in the short term with some of the immediate needs with respect to education and recognition of the role of the representative structures in the

(Mr. Samuel)

reconstruction of education. Undoubtedly there were some people who opposed those initiatives for political reasons, but that should not be an obstacle. South Africa was going through a critical period in its history, and education would play an extremely important role in the reconstruction process. Accordingly, when dealing with those issues, it was vital not to make a wrong decision or to choose a wrong course so as not to find oneself, 20 years later, in a still graver crisis.

9. In conclusion, he recalled that the international community had played a very important role in the long struggle of the black people against apartheid. That support must continue in order to conserve the gains which had been achieved and, on that basis, create a new, democratic and just South Africa.

10. Mr. MANGANYI (Vice-Chancellor, University of the North) said that the remarks made at the meeting must be viewed within the context of the transition that was currently taking place in South Africa. There was an urgent need to review policies, strategies and needs in respect of education and training. The importance of resolving the educational crisis in a timely fashion could not be overstressed, not only for the transition period but in order to create a South Africa that was free from racial discrimination.

11. The planning of human resources on a national scale in South Africa was being hampered by more than three decades of education under the apartheid system and by the bureaucratic fragmentation of the country into so-called-states, which made it impossible to obtain reliable statistics. Nevertheless, it was possible to forecast that although transition would bring with it important political changes, it would be difficult to achieve equally significant economic changes, owing to the shortage of qualified staff. Moreover, Africanization of the public sector, which was an essential measure, would be hindered by that same shortage. The supply of qualified labour was inadequate, particularly in information technology, computer, and other similar areas. The main reason for that situation was that until recently higher education had been organized on the basis of racial principles. In order to be able to establish a new economic order, it would be necessary to adopt provisional measures to expand the capacity of the higher education system and facilitate the training of technical personnel.

12. In the past 30 years, ethnic universities had been established in the country which were guided not by educational principles but by ideological criteria; for that reason, they had been met by resistance and rejection on the part of the black community. Black students had gone to those universities because no other option had been open to them. In the mid-1980s, the Government had granted autonomy to those universities, but had then abandoned them to their own resources by not providing them with sufficient funding. Those institutions must be strengthened so tht they could cope with the huge demand currently existing in the country, bearing in mind that the burden of apartheid had fallen heavily on them. Recent statistics showed

that the vast majority of black students attended those universities, while only 6 per cent attended white universities. Special assistance would be needed to bolster teaching capacity, since many young people arrived ill-prepared to undertake university studies. Funds would also have to be allocated to provide financial aid to the many students who could not pay for their studies.

13. In view of recent events in the country, the time was ripe for making the requisite changes in the universities, which meant changing academic and also administrative criteria. That would require financial support from national and international sources. In his view, educational reforms did not have to wait for a political settlement in South Africa. Such reforms should begin immediately, since education was one of the prerequisites for democracy.

14. Ms. MATSEPE-CASABURRI (Director of the Educational Development Trust) said that the educational crisis in South Africa manifested itself in various ways. With regard to the preparation of young blacks for higher education, one of the most serious problems was the regional imbalance resulting from the transfer of a large percentage of the population to rural areas. Some 70 per cent of the young people currently preparing to enter higher education were living in rural areas.

15. The solutions which the Government had proposed to the South African community for changing the educational system and permitting multiracial education were not having the desired effect, owing in part to the Government's delay in promoting the transition. In the Transvaal, for example, only 50 out of 147 schools which had requested permission to set up multiracial classes had been authorized to do so. Moreover, the proposed solutions dealt mainly with the problems of urban areas, rather than rural areas where the majority of young blacks lived.

16. Teacher training was another serious problem. In rural areas, there were very few teachers specialized in mathematics and science, making it difficult for students to enter those disciplines.

17. Furthermore, an entire generation had suffered the repercussions of violence. The occupation of secondary schools and universities had had serious consequences for young people. Many of them had fled the country and had tried to complete their education in other countries. In some cases, their decision to leave had brought harm to their families, for when students left the country, parents were subjected to harassment, especially in rural areas.

18. The problem of the status of women in universities should also be noted. In general, women were not encouraged to pursue careers in technology, which were critically important to the country. Without such a contribution by women, the goal of a society free of discrimination against women could not be achieved. Those were some of the urgent problems in education. The search

(Ms. Matsepe-Casaburri)

for solutions to those problems should have begun already. The international community must assist South Africa in the process of change so that it could asusme its rightful place in the world.

19. Mr. GERWEL (Vice-Rector of the University of the Western Cape) said that he wished to conclude the various statements by emphasizing the concept of struggle. To some people that concept was a cliché, but to him, and to all those throughout the world who were battling oppression, it was a multifaceted, inspiring and invigorating force which sought the achievement of a more humane society. Since February 1990, the international community might have thought that the struggle in South Africa was over and that the country, led by President de Klerk, was leaving repression and exploitation behind. In his view, while he did not wish to belittle the process under way, South Africa had merely reached a decisive stage in its national liberation struggle, although now it had taken a significant step forward with the start of negotiations for the establishment of democracy.

20. The leading sectors of the organized resistance to apartheid had for decades advocated defining the situation in South Africa in terms of its colonial characteristics. Apartheid was not just a minority regime, it was a social order based on an historic colonial dispossession and was characterized essentially by a colonial relationship. In South Africa, political and social change were inseparable. South Africa's national liberation movement was the oldest in Africa and the last to reach the stage of national liberation, but that gave it a certain perspective for the building of society. South Africans were aware that political change could not be confined to institutions and must be accompanied by a significant transformation in the lives of the masses of poor and working people.

21. With regard to the discussion of the economic rights to a job and to a decent life in society, he said that the contribution of education to the process of change was fundamental. Education under the apartheid regime had been characterized by an insufficient transfer of knowledge and by deliberate underdevelopment of the talents of the majority of the population, especially in certain fields such as science and mathematics which were of great importance to the country. The South African economy, which was based mainly on mining, needed to develop a manufacturing sector in order to survive into the next century and therefore required a population trained in science and technology. As an educator, he believed that what the apartheid regime had done to the majority of its people in the educational field could only be described as a crime against humanity.

22. The rebuilding of soeiety should have two primary goals. The first was the objective correction of the structural imbalances in the allocation of resources for the education of the majority; the second was a subjective challenge, namely, recreating a culture of learning within South African society. Apartheid education had undermined respect for learning, just as apartheid legislation had undermined respect for the law.

(Mr. Gerwel)

23. Lastly, he emphasized that the struggle for a just and humane society in South Africa was not over, and warned the international community to remain vigilant in order to ensure that the changes were not purely formal. It was necessary to resist the concept of privatization of education, which implied privatizing a social responsibility. Educational reforms must be viewed as an integral part of a broader process of social change encompassing housing, healthcare, job creation and job security. It was also necessary to resist an overly utilitarian approach to educational reform, whereby the primary function of education would be to provide manpower. Educational reforms and the rebuilding of South Africa must be based on non-racist, democratic values.

24. The CHAIRMAN invited participants in the meeting to make comments or raise any questions they might have.

25. Mr. DANKWA (Ghana) said that he agreed with Mr. Gerwel that political change was not enough, although political power was essential in order to effect any transformation of society. He endorsed Mr. Samuel's view that, since apartheid was a product of the mind, education was the best way of bringing about change. He had taken note of the activities of the joint working group and had been particularly impressed by its efforts to create a unified educational system. However, even if the necessary measures were taken in such areas as curricula and teacher training, the question was how to ensure that people of all races attended school and promoted social interaction in a society where both land and communities were segregated by law. One therefore could not propose educational reforms just to bring about such external changes as the unification of curricula or a common language for education. He would be grateful if Mr. Samuel would clarify that point.

26. With regard to Mr. Manganyi's remark concerning the distortion resulting from the establishment of universities solely for blacks, he would appreciate an explanation of the concept of distortion. It must be emphasized that there had been opposition to the universities in question solely because they had been imposed by the apartheid regime and reaffirmed the principle of segregation in education.

27. Moreover, it had been said that educational reform could not wait until political change took place. However, it had been the struggle to bring about change in political structures that had made it possible even to raise the issue of the need for educational reform. No distinction should be drawn between political struggle and the struggle to bring about educational change, and no priorities should be set in that connection.

28. Mr. OLIYNYK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the academic experts had referred to the establishment of a programme to bring about long-term educational change. One major issue was the education of minorities, which took on particular importance at a time when the United Nations was beginning the second reading of the draft declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic

(Mr. Oliynyk, Ukrainian SSR)

minorities. In the Ukrainian SSR there were over 120 ethnic minorities, and an endeavour was being made to solve their problems. He would be interested to know whether it would be possible in South Africa for minorities to be educated in their mother tongue.

29. Mr. GUPTA (Rapporteur), referring to the link between political struggle and educational reform, said that education derived from the political regime and it was conceivable that if the political system in South Africa was reformed education would automatically undergo change. However, account must also be taken of the need for adequate teacher training in the transitional stage; he would be interested to hear the views of those present on that matter.

30. The CHAIRMAN said that Mr. Samuel had referred to a joint working group on the education crisis. He wondered when the group would issue its report and whether the report would cover only immediate educational needs or whether it would contain an education plan for the longer term.

31. Mr. SAMUEL (Education Director, African National Congress of South Africa) said that currently action in the field of education was being taken in a more general political framework. Education obviously could not solve all social problems, such as unemployment and social inequalities. However, the endeavour in question was not separate from the struggle against apartheid. Apartheid persisted; although the Government had initiated a process, it did not intend to dismantle the system entirely. The struggle against apartheid continued, and in the specific case of education an endeavour was being made to force the State to remedy backwardness resulting from historic factors. The programme for reform in education must be seen in that light.

32. With regard to the issuance of the joint working group's report, the report in question should be available in early June. Although it would stress immediate, visible measures, medium-term measures were also planned. Consideration in greater depth of the provision of education in the future must be an integral part of the political negotiating process. Since that task did not fall within the working group's purview it should be carried out in the wider context of political issues.

33. Mr. MANGANYI, responding to the points raised by the representative of Ghana, said that it would be a mistake to conclude that in his statement he had advocated that the political negotiating process and the solution of constitutional problems should be separated from the need to undertake immediate initiatives to solve problems in the area of education. What he had meant to say was that in practice there were various entities in South African society that were devoting attention to different aspects of the same process. Thus, for example, while negotiations between the African National Congress and the Government continued, teachers and representatives of other social groups must deal with certain issues, and the education crisis was one of the most crucial issues.

(Mr. Manganyi)

34. With regard to the concept of distortion, to which a member of the Committee had referred, he had used that term with reference to the structural disequilibria created by apartheid in the area of education. For example, if an academic institution was in a rural area, its ability to compete was in fact limited in many respects; it could be very difficult for such an institution to attract suitable academic and administrative staff. Such a situation could, in turn, have a great impact on the type of courses taught and on the ability of such an institution to compete with other institutions in attracting students or obtaining financial resources from the Government. That was a distortion or, in other words, a structural disequilibrium resulting from Government policy.

35. Ms. MATSEPE-CASABURRI, responding to a point concerning education for minorities in their mother tongue, said that in the case of South Africa that issue was generally erroneously raised in the context of the white minorities, and not in the context of the black ethnic minorities. However, it was a misrepresentation of the situation in South Africa to assert that Afrikaans was a language spoken by a white minority, since there were very large groups in the black population whose first language was Afrikaans. No racial group had a monopoly over a language. The issue of the language policy to be adopted was being given careful consideration. It was an issue that affected the entire country, not just individual groups. South Africa's multilingual nature was not a drawback for the country but a source of enrichment. One of the effects of apartheid had been to separate the black populations from one another, and it had thus not been possible for that linguistic wealth to develop fully.

36. Mr. PHEKO (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania), referring to the statement made by Mr. Gerwel, said that it was important to stress the colonial aspects of the situation in South Africa. The apartheid system was a manifestation of a colonial situation that had not been resolved. Not until the political issues had been settled would it be possible to settle the remaining issues.

37. The CHAIRMAN thanked the academic experts who had participated in the meeting for the detailed information they had provided. The Special Committee had always believed that hearing the views of eminent South Africans helped to ensure that Committee members had a better understanding of the issues before them. That was particularly important now, at a time when a political process designed to eliminate apartheid had been started.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 649th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 7 June 1991, at 4.20 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. OUDOVENKO (Ukrainian SSR)

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Adoption of the agenda

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The meeting was called to order at 4.20 p.m.

MINUTE OF SILENCE IN TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF MR. IBRAHIM NOOR, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE AGAINST APARTHEID AND SECRETARY OF THE COMMITTEE

1. On the proposal of the Chairman, the members of the Committee observed a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of Mr. Ibrahim Noor, Assistant Director of the Centre against Apartheid and Secretary of the Committee.

2. Mr. MOUSOURIS (Assistant-Secretary-General, Centre against Apartheid), speaking on behalf of the Centre against Apartheid and Mr. Noor's family, expressed appreciation to the members of the Committee for their sympathy and support.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

3. The agenda was adopted.

ADOPTION OF THE INTERIM REPORT

4. Mr. GUPTA (India), Rapporteur, said that the draft interim report of the Committee, which had been prepared in accordance with General Assembly resolution A/45/176 E, focused attention on the provisions of the Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa and subsequent resolutions adopted by consensus. The report provided a brief survey of the developments that had taken place in South Africa, including a number of positive steps by the South African regime, and indicated that much more needed to be done to create a climate conducive to negotiations.

5. The report also drew attention to actions by individual countries and noted that, while Member States agreed that apartheid should be eradicated, there had been considerable departures from the Programme of Action laid down in the Declaration and that the recent relaxation of sanctions was a matter of grave concern. Lastly, the draft report concluded that the international community should foster through pressure and assistance the process of negotiations on a new constitution and see to it that a united, non-racial and democratic society in South Africa was established as soon as possible.

6. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should adopt the draft interim report section by section.

7. It was so decided.

8. Sections I, II, III, IV and V of the interim report were adopted.

9. The report as a whole was adopted.

10. Mr. REKSODIPUTRO (Indonesia) expressed satisfaction at the research carried out by the Secretariat in drawing up the interim report and the spirit of cooperation demonstrated by the Rapporteur concerning the amendments that had been made.

11. Mr. OLIYNYK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) commended the research work by the Secretariat which had made it possible to draft the interim report. The report would be useful to the international community in its efforts to bring about the ultimate elimination of apartheid.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.